

Jennifer Beck

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DDS Cuts

Thank you to the co-chairs, Senator Osten, Senator Formica, and Representative Walker, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee. I am testifying today to urge the committee to reject the \$25 million in cuts that the Governor has proposed to DDS.

The Governor's budget largely relies on privatizing group homes, and in so doing, saving money by laying off state workers and underpaying private sector workers. This balances the budget on the backs of middle class workers and people with disabilities.

DDS therapists provide a specialized service to meet the unique needs of the individuals we serve. Two main areas of concern are risk of injuries from falls; which is addressed by physical therapy, and illness and death caused by dysphagia or trouble swallowing; which is addressed by speech and occupational therapy.

In May of 2016 all of the speech therapists and 75% of the occupational Therapists were cut as part of labor savings. Leaving three OT staff to cover the swallowing concerns from Newington, to Granby to Putnam.

As group homes privatize; OT/PT/ST in the community are overwhelmingly underprepared to serve the unique needs of the individuals supported by DDS. And the limited community services are sidestepped in favor of overburdened nurses and under skilled supervisors to screen and implement special dysphagia diets for prevention of aspiration pneumonia and possibly death.

People with disabilities deserve the right to receive skilled care in the setting of their choice. Caregivers in both sectors deserve high quality training. The state cannot continue to look to us for sacrifices, we have sacrificed enough already. This is not a good way to save money in the long term. Middle class jobs are good for the economy. Keeping group home residents where they already know they thrive can delay costly health care concerns down the road.

The obvious solution is to stop cutting DDS. I urge you to disregard the cuts requested in the Governor's budget and work with us going forward to find a way to help us provide the best care to our families.

Jennifer Beck,

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